In the Beginning...Creativity by Gordon D. Kaufman

A Ground-Breaking Resolution Of The Faith-Science Debate

Gordon Kaufman's bold and highly regarded works over the last thirty years have pushed theologians to examine honestly, if painfully, their most cherished assumptions about God. Now, in this major contribution to the theology-and-science debate, he argues that our traditional thinking about and worship of God have prepared us badly for perhaps the most important problem we face today—the ecological crisis. Kaufman begins with a survey of the pluriform development and effects of the notion of God. He then demonstrates how these concepts of God have become out of sync with contemporary understandings of the world and humanity. He offers an alternative concept by distinguishing the different modalities of creativity as they figure in the creation of the universe, the cosmic evolutionary process (especially the emergence of life), and human symbolic creativity. Finally, he sketches their interconnections and demonstrates in what way they stand for the divine. This volume not only develops further than ever before Kaufman's idea of God as creativity but also shows what it would mean to think of God in this way, to live with faith in this God, and to cooperate with the divine in meeting our most pressing challenges.

My Personal Review:
For religious people a challenge is to bridge their belief in God with scientific explanations of the world. There is a huge need for a new understanding of God that bridges these viewpoints, but there are few books by theologians that resolve the debate. Gordon Kaufman is Professor Emeritus at the Harvard Divinity School. His book is the first that makes a big step forward on this issue. Starting with the notion offered in the Bible of God as Creator he offers a proposal of God as "creativity". Creativity as a mystery that somehow was involved in the initial coming into being of the universe, in evolutionary processes, and in human symbolic creativity. With this modern understanding of God we can reflect on life in new ways. This framework means that God is only partly directed to human welfare. The larger part is directed to the power of the universe, and on earth to the balance of nature. Thinking of God as creativity implies that God can produce novel things from unknown causes as has happened in evolution. This framework is a scholarly step forward towards resolving the faith-science debate. It provides a framework where God is not Protestant, Jew or Muslim. And it plants protection of the environment as a foundation of moral life. Kaufman wants people to continue with their
religious traditions, but with a bigger understanding of God. He is following the same theme Albert Einstein described in his writings on religion. And Kaufman's proposal complements the religious naturalist proposals of Ursula Goodenough. I liked this book because it gave me a workable understanding of God that allows me to reflect on where God-driven creativity is going on, and how individuals and societies can do better supporting divine creativities.

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